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ABSTRACT

The report summarizes a British research project, part of a larger initiative on educational quality, concerning the extent of secondary students' knowledge about the nature of language, native and foreign, alongside development of practical language skills. The main study was an empirical investigation of the teaching of English and foreign languages at year 9 in three schools. It documented teachers' beliefs and practices with regard to knowledge about language (KAL) and the current state of year 9 pupils' knowledge in five areas (language as a system, language learning/development, language variation by use and by user, language change). The pupils' use of KAL in language performance and the relationship between their developing understanding of language and language learning were also studied. Results of another study were also re-analyzed for data concerning these issues at year 7. Overall, the project revealed substantial levels of KAL-related activity in English and foreign languages within the schools, and some suggestions of its positive contribution to learning, especially in writing. It is concluded, however, that given the fragmented and episodic nature of mush KAL work, its full potential contribution to pupils' development as language users is not being realized. Suggestions for improvement are made. (MSE)

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University of Southampton

CENTRE FOR LANGUAGE IN EDUCATION

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FINAL REPORT: "KNOWLEDGE ABOUT LANGUAGE", LANGUAGE LEARNING, AND THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM

PROJECT FUNDED BY ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RESEARCH COUNCIL UNDER THE "QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING" INITIATIVE

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"KNOWLEDGE ABOUT LANGUAGE", LANGUAGE LEARNING, AND THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM

Summary

This report provides an overview of a project funded by ESRC from 1991 - 1993 within the framework of the cluster of projects known as the "Quality of Teaching and Learning" Initiative. All projects within the Initiative had some concern with the changing nature of curriculum provision under the new National Curriculum. Ours was the sole project primarily concerned with language issues, and was titled "'Knowledge about Language', Language Learning and the National Curriculum".

The term "Knowledge about Language" (KAL) has become current in curriculum debates since the late 1980s, as a new title for an old concern: that pupils learning languages in formal settings should acquire some explicit understandings and knowledge of the nature of language, alongside the development of practical language skills. In this report, we briefly review the range of rationales which have been advanced in recent years in support of this position, and a number of competing definitions of "Knowledge about Language", highlighting the absence of consensus achieved so far. We then report on two empirical studies undertaken within the research project.

The main study was an empirical investigation of the teaching of English and of foreign languages at Year 9 in three case study schools, which documented teachers' current beliefs and practices with regard to KAL through both observation and interview. We provide accounts of the current state of Year 9 pupils' knowledge in five distinct KAL areas, elicited through a range of group discussion tasks. Finally we discuss Year 9 pupils' use of KAL in language performance, and the relationship between their developing understanding of language and language learning.

In an extension study, interview data gathered by another project within the Initiative, concerned with the effective teaching of English and History, was re-analysed for supplementary information on teachers' and pupils' knowledge, beliefs and practices with respect to KAL at Year 7. We present the findings of this analysis, and in addition, we examine briefly the place of metacomment and reflection in the teaching of Year 7 History.

Overall, the project revealed substantial levels of KAL-related activity in English and foreign languages, and some suggestions of its positive contribution to learning, especially for control and planning in writing. However, given the fragmented and episodic nature of much KAL work, its full potential contribution to pupils' development as language users is not currently being realised. We conclude that a more consistent developmental perspective on KAL, and further clarification of both goals and content, are needed to guide teachers in this aspect of their work.

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We must also thank ESRC for funding the project, and for the general encouragement to think in a cross-curricular framework which came from participation in the "Quality of Teaching and Learning" Initiative. At some time, colleagues from all the different projects in the Initiative have influenced our thinking; however, special thanks must go to Donald McIntyre and Paul Cooper of the Oxford University project within the Initiative, for their willingness to make an important part of their own data available to us at an early stage. We are also grateful to Martin Hughes, the Initiative Coordinator, for his good-humoured support and guidance.

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RFM, JVH, CJB

Introduction

Every competent language user, no matter what their level of formal education, has developed a certain level of awareness of the nature of language and how it functions as a system, apparently as a result of their practical experience of language use. This has been demonstrated for illiterate, unschooled adults (e.g. by Scribner & Cole, 1981), and also for children still in the process of acquiring their first language (see review by Bowey, 1988). However, formal education adds a substantial increment to this implicit metalinguistic awareness, initially as an inevitable by-product of literacy training (which, for example, promotes awareness of the double articulation by which "letters" in different combinations go to make up "words").

The Project reported here was funded in the Centre for Language in Education, School of Education, University of Southampton, by the Economic and Social Research Council as part of its "Quality of Teaching and Learning Initiative", from April 1991 till September 1993. It was concerned with the efforts of teachers and the curricula they are operating to move beyond more or less implicit states of metalinguistic awareness, to promote articulated and explicit understandings of the nature of language among their pupils. This explicit understanding has been given a variety of labels, most notably the term "language awareness" current in 1980s discussions (e.g. Donmall, 1985). In this paper however we shall be following the dominant usage in current British curriculum debates, and referring to explicit, conscious and articulated understanding by the label "Knowledge about Language" (or KAL for short).

The rise-fall-rise of Knowledge about Language

Language educators have traditionally seen some role for "Knowledge about Language" in their teaching programme, whether their main concern was with mother tongue/standard language development, or with the teaching of second/foreign languages. Most obviously, the academic teaching of second/ foreign languages has traditionally centred around the study of pedagogic grammars, and indeed much early linguistic analysis (for Latin and Greek at least) was undertaken in the service of second language pedagogy. The formal teaching of English as a standard language in the 18th and 19th centuries, to a newly-literate mass public, was preoccupied with notions of "correctness" which also led to a concern with sentence-level explicit grammatical analysis and instruction (Crowley, 1989).

The 20th century has however seen the growth of more experiential theories of language learning and development for both L1 and second/foreign languages, and their increasing influence even in formal education. Most obviously, teachers of English in England, themselves typically the product of an entirely literature-oriented training in higher education, have espoused "growth" oriented pedagogic philosophies and largely marginalised the formal teaching of grammar (Allen, 1988; Chandler, 1988; Protherough, 1989). Teachers of foreign languages also, influenced by the behavioural concerns of the "communicative language teaching" movement (Brumfit & Johnson, 1979), as well as by the more accessible "nativist" theories of second language acquisition (most notably the ideas of Stephen Krashen: e.g. Krashen, 1981), have shifted their concerns somewhat towards the promotion within the classroom of more meaning oriented target language use (Mitchell, 1988; Peck, 1988).

However, discussions about both the teaching of English as a standard language, and second foreign language teaching, have been characterised by some recent "revisionism" on the KAL question. For the standard language, recent British government initiatives have reflected concern at English teachers' perceived lack of linguistic knowledge (DES 1988, Chapter 6), and a major INSET programme was devised to address this (LINC, n.d.; Carter, 1990). The report of the Kingman Committee proposed an extensive programme of systematic, explicit language study for schools (DES, 1988, Chapter 5), and a limited KAL element was incorporated in the new National Curriculum for English legally adopted two years later (DES/WO, 1990). In foreign language teaching, official British curriculum documents have remained mostly hostile to offering a renewed/ extended place for KAL, though the National Curriculum for "Modern Foreign Languages" accords limited recognition to the issue (DES/WO, 1991). However, revived international debates on the role of "instruction" in classroom foreign language learning (see reviews in e.g. Ellis, 1990, Harley, 1993) have led to a revival of interest in the contribution of pedagogic grammar to learning, in the new guises of "consciousness-raising" or "input enhancement" (e.g. Sharwood-Smith, 1993).

Rationales and Models

The recent revival of interest in "Knowledge about Language" has however been marked by considerable controversy and disagreement, among academic researchers, within the teaching profession, and on a wider political stage. The controversial status of "Knowledge about Language" was perhaps most obviously symbolised in England by ministerial hostility to, and eventual refusal to permit publication of, the materials produced by the government-funded £23 million LINC teacher training project (Carter, 1992). Essentially, these disagreements focus around rival definitions of "Knowledge about Language", and more fundamentally, around alternative rationales for its inclusion in the curriculum.

In earlier papers (Brumfit et al, 1992; Mitchell et al, 1992) we summarised the range of possible rationales for KAL which have recently been argued for by different groups. The main traditional rationale has been of course the claim that explicit study of language makes a positive contribution to mastery of the language system, and the development of aspects of learners' productive language skills. This argument is reasserted with respect to English in the Kingman Report (though, as Widdowson has pointed out in his "Note of Reservation", not thoroughly argued: DES, 1988:77-8); press commentaries around the LINC controversy reflect continuing popular belief that explicit grammar instruction is essential to ensure accurate mastery of (especially written) Standard English (see Mitchell, 1993). Alternative rationales more recently developed for KAL-focused activity include concerns to promote public understanding of individual and societal bi- and multilingualism, as part of the appropriate educational response to increasing ethnic and cultural diversity (DES, 1985); the "critical language awareness" movement, which seeks to sensitise pupils to the social meaning of language variation, and (mis)uses of language for social control; and the view that motivation for second/ foreign language learning can be enhanced by the study of relationships between different languages, and/or of language development itself.

These varying perspectives on the purposes of talk about language in the classroom lead to varying interpretations on the aspects of language which it makes sense to talk about. Traditionally, "KAL" was interpreted largely as sentence-level grammar, witnessed by

English teachers' lingering equation of KAL with their childhood experiences of "clause analysis" (Chandler, 1988). However, recent proponents of KAL work have been influenced in varying degrees by the expanded vision of the nature of language offered by contemporary linguistics. Thus for example, discussions of KAL for foreign language classrooms have been influenced by the concept of "communicative competence", and especially its attendant notion of appropriacy; discussions of KAL among English teachers have commonly been influenced by sociolinguistic perspectives on language variation, while the LINC project reflected a broadly Hallidayan perspective on the nature of language, carrying for example an increased emphasis on the structure and workings of whole texts and language genres.

A range of more or less formal "models" for KAL has been proposed in the course of current debates, reflecting these differing rationales and theoretical orientations in some degree. The Kingman Report proposed a well-elaborated model with four main dimensions:

1. The forms of the English language (speech, writing, word forms, phrase structure and sentence structure, discourse structure);

2. Communication and comprehension;

3. Acquisition and development;

4. Historical and geographical variation. (DES, 1988)

The Cox Report, whose proposals led to the initial, teacher-friendly version of the English National Curriculum (DES/WO, 1990), redressed the much-criticised neglect by Kingman of social aspects of language variation, with a three-strand model (but one which actually excludes the "grammar" dimension):

1. Language variation according to situation, purpose, mode, regional or social group, etc.;

2. Language in literature;

3. Language variation across time. (DES 1989, para 6.19)

The LINC Project, in one version of its proposed unit on "Pupils' Knowledge about Language", suggested "five linked areas which could be seen as a core of explicit KAL":

1. Language variety (between speech and writing; of accents and dialects; of functions, styles and registers [in speech and writing]; variety in and connections between languages);

2. Language and society (speaker/listener, reader/writer relationships, for both interpersonal and mass uses of language, with particular reference to the ways in which social power is determined by language use);

3. Language acquisition and development;

4. History of languages;

5. Language as a system (vocabulary; grammar; phonology and graphology [including spelling patterns and scripts]; textual organisation and conventions; semantics - the sharing or mismatching of meaning between users). (LINC n.d.)

As language education researchers with longstanding interests in curriculum policy-making, we have been concerned that such proposals and counter-proposals regarding the place of KAL in the English and foreign languages curriculum were being made without any serious elaboration of underlying rationales. Connections between policy proposals and theories of language learning/ development remain unclear, and important policy decisions are being taken in the absence of any substantial empirical evidence regarding teachers' personal knowledge and ability to deliver a KAL curriculum, or of their current classroom practices in this area. While psycholinguistically oriented research is ongoing into the growth of children's implicit metalinguistic awareness, little is known about the explicit and articulated "knowledge about language" which they might possess, or how pupils might exploit this knowledge to improve performance in the language classroom.

In 1988-89, we had conducted a small scale interview survey exploring teachers' knowledge and beliefs in the KAL area (Mitchell & Hooper, 1992). The ESRC's "Quality of Teaching and Learning" (QTL) Initiative launched in 1991 offered a timely opportunity to conduct a much larger scale observational study which could contribute substantial accounts of current practice to the debate, as teachers began to implement National Curriculum proposals for language.

Objectives

The project was originally funded for a 26-month period, from April 1991. Some extension work was subsequently funded, so that the project ended finally on 30 September 1993.

The original bid for the project listed five aims:

1. *To document the understandings of secondary English and foreign language teachers regarding the nature of language, their beliefs about the role of explicit knowledge about language in language education, and their reactions to National Curriculum policy proposals in this area.*

2. *To document and compare the handling of explicit knowledge about language in English and foreign language classrooms, both as a pre-planned topic and in response to pupil initiatives and discussion of ongoing work.*

3. *To explore the models of language held by 13-14 year old pupils and their origins, in the classroom and outside it.*

4. *To document how such pupils make use of explicit KAL in the course of English/ FLs classroom activities and assignments.*

5. *To explore relationships between knowledge and understanding of language and the development of pupils' English/ FLs skills.*

Thus, the principal aims of the project (summarised in points 1-4 above) had to do with the description of the current state of teachers' and pupils' knowledge, beliefs and practices with respect to KAL. The final aim (point 5) was much more tentative, as we were well aware that a descriptive study could provide no definitive answers on any cause-effect relationships which might obtain between explicit KAL study and the development of language skills. Nonetheless, given the centrality of this issue in debates about rationales for KAL, we were concerned to address it at least in a preliminary way.

Collaboration with another project in the Initiative, and the willingness of ESRC to fund a small extension to the Southampton project in summer 1993, allowed us to address some supplementary aims. The Southampton project collected data relating to Year 9 (13-year-olds) only. In a companion project based at Oxford University, teachers of English and History had been observed teaching both Year 7 and Year 9 classes (Cooper and McIntyre, 1993). Following the lessons, both teachers and pupils had been interviewed at length regarding their perceptions of the lessons' success, and the reasons for this. We realised that these data could provide a) valuable extra material on the teaching of English, and b) an opportunity to compare our findings on the role of meta-talk in language lessons with data from another subject area (History).

So eventually, in the extension to the Southampton project, two supplementary aims were pursued:

6. *To compare the reports of Year 9 pupils, and their knowledge frameworks, with those of younger pupils (using the Oxford Year 7 English data);*

7. *To compare the KAL-related talk of both Oxfordshire and Hampshire pupils with respect to the teaching and learning of English and MLs, with pupils' talk about teaching and learning in another subject area, to seek similarities and differences in the reported classroom use of metacomment and reflection (using the Oxford History data).*

In all, Oxford data for four English teachers and their Year 7 classes have been analysed, providing supplementary evidence on KAL work for younger pupils (Aim 6). The work of two History teachers has been analysed for comparative evidence of metacomment and reflection on the nature and skills of History as a discipline (Aim 7).

Methods

As seen above, the aims of the project were primarily descriptive, and the methodology was that of case study, combining qualitative and quantitative methods of data analysis. Data were gathered by means of classroom observation, teacher and pupil interviews, and pupil discussion activities and problem-solving tasks. In addition, secondary analysis was carried out on transcripts from another project (Oxford).

Preliminary phase

Three state secondary schools in Hampshire agreed to collaborate in the research; they were selected primarily to reflect differing pupil intakes and settings. School 1 was a mixed 11-16 comprehensive in a suburban area. School 2 was a similar school in a more urban area, but with a 12-16 intake. School 3 was an inner-city 12-16 girls' school with a proportion of bilingual pupils.

Preliminary visits were made in the summer term (1991) preceding the main study, to make contacts with relevant staff, to observe language classes in action, and to trial ideas for KAL elicitation techniques.

Classroom observation

In order to address Aim 2 of the project, during the first main fieldwork phase (Autumn 1991 - Spring 1992), Year 9 classes in the three schools were observed and audio-recorded through extended (7-8 week) parallel sequences of English and FLs lessons.

Seven teachers were observed, teaching 8 classes (3 English classes, 3 French, 1 German, 1 Spanish). The English classes were all mixed ability. The French were two upper sets, plus one mixed ability class; the German a lower set; and the Spanish a group selected for a second foreign language. The number of actual lessons observed per teacher ranged from 12 to 29. Within each school, the observed classes overlapped to some extent, so that some pupils were observed in both language contexts.

During the lessons, a fieldworker took contextualising notes, and managed the audiorecording of whole class and small group work. Relevant documentation was also gathered, including teaching materials used, samples of pupils' written work, and school policies.

A systematic scheme was developed and used to code retrospectively all KAL-related episodes identified within a selection of the recorded lessons. In this scheme, KAL-related 'episodes' were identified and coded on four dimensions. Dimension A identified the broad 'area' of KAL addressed, as one of the following:

1. Language as System (syntax, lexis etc)
2. Language Acquisition/Development
3. Language Variation according to Use (style and genre)
4. Language Variation according to User (accent, dialect, bilingualism)
5. Language Change through Time.

Dimension B identified the 'level' of language under consideration, from isolated letters/sounds to whole texts. Dimension C was concerned with the extent to which KAL incidents appeared to be pre-planned, or arose incidentally; and Dimension D recorded aspects of the teacher's pedagogic strategy in dealing with KAL topics. The results of the systematic coding were integrated into an individual 'KAL Profile' for each teacher, which drew also on on-the-spot notes.

Teacher interviews

A series of interviews with the seven participating teachers were the main source of information relevant to Aim 1 of the project. These interviews served primarily to document the decision-making underlying the teaching strategies observed, and rationales for promoting discussion related to KAL. The first interview aimed to gather an overview of the teachers' reported teaching strategies and their general beliefs about the nature of language and language learning, and to explore rationales for the systematic discussion and analysis of language matters. Post-observation interviews probed teachers' impressions of the progress made by the classes observed, and the major influences on that progress; they also explored the teachers' reactions to evolving National Ccurriculum policy for languages, and their developing strategies for implementation in the KAL area. In a final interview, teachers were asked to comment on the possible contribution of KAL to specific texts (oral or written) produced by their pupils.

Pupil tasks

During the second main fieldwork phase (Summer 1992), pupils carried out a range of tasks specially devised to explore more fully their knowledge and understanding of language (Aim 3).

These tasks were related to the five KAL areas listed above. For each area, problem-solving and discussion tasks were devised which could be carried out and audiorecorded by pupils working in small groups, under the general supervision of the fieldworker. The tasks were piloted in three other schools before administration to the case-study classes. Tasks were typically administered to complete classes, during normal lesson time, but in the absence of the teacher; all Year 9 classes participating in the observational study undertook several tasks, though no single class did all the tasks.

During the same term (Summer 1992), selected pupils were interviewed about the pieces of work also discussed with their teachers, in order to explore the perceived role of KAL in planning and producing texts (Aims 4 and 5). In all, 46 pupils were interviewed individually (between 4 and 6 across the ability range from each class). These pupils were asked to explain the guidance given for the task, sources of help and advice in text production, their own evaluation of their work, and their perceptions of any teacher feedback they had received.

Year 7 data

Finally, in summer 1993, secondary analysis was carried out on a corpus of interview transcripts with English and History teachers and their Year 7 pupils, made available by the Oxford project. The English transcripts were analysed systematically, seeking accounts of KAL-related classroom activities, evidence of the state of teachers' and pupils' knowledge about language, and their perceptions of its role in language development (for eventual use in meeting Aim 6). The History transcripts were analysed similarly, seeking accounts of metacomment and reflection on subject skills and processes (Aim 7).

RESULTS

KAL in the Foreign Languages classroom

There were clear differences between the four FLs teachers (B, C, D, F) in their overall teaching styles and approaches to KAL. Most obviously, the amount of time devoted to pre-planned KAL work varied considerably. Teacher B, for example, seemed to operate a regular pattern in which every third or fourth lesson had a major KAL focus; Teacher D included one or more planned KAL episodes in a majority of her lessons; and Teacher F included brief planned episodes in just four lessons over seven weeks of observation. Teacher C included regular KAL episodes in her French lessons, but virtually none in her German lessons.

However, in important respects the approach of the FLs teachers was similar. Area 1 "Language as System" received much the most consistent attention, though topics of phonology/grammar/vocabulary were not covered exhaustively. Three teachers concentrated their attention on aspects of morpho-syntax, at a sub-sentence level, and followed closely the grammatical topics proposed in the textbook they were using (e.g. aspects of verb morphology or number marking). The fourth teacher, Teacher D, used no textbook systematically, and concentrated her KAL work in Area 1 on sentence structure, teaching the concepts 'subject', 'verb' and 'complement' through a variety of action games.

The FLs teachers typically pre-planned the KAL episodes observed in class, and taught them in whole-class mode, predominantly through the medium of English. (Teacher F stuck orally to Spanish, though also providing formal grammar notes in English.) The main techniques employed during KAL episodes were explanation, exemplification, and drawing parallels with English/translating; rule-giving occurred regularly but less frequently.

Another common feature of the FLs classrooms was the low incidence of KAL episodes other than "Language as System". Teacher D was somewhat exceptional in paying systematic attention to Area 2 "Language Acquisition", which she did by regularly asking her pupils at the end of lessons what new language they thought they had learned that day, and reflecting explicitly on the usefulness of a range of conscious learning strategies. The few Area 3 "Variation According to Use" episodes were mostly accounted for by talk about polite and familiar address forms in French (the 'tu'/'vous' distinction). In the whole coded FLs corpus there were only four explicit, broader comments on particular language genres (also Area 3),

three of them on the layout of letters. Areas 4 (dialectal/ multilingual issues) and 5 (language change) received only passing mention.

How can this FL emphasis on morphological subsystems best be accounted for? Three of the teachers (B, C/French, and F) seem to have made a strategic commitment to building up, over time, a 'reference model' of selected aspects of the morphosyntax of the target language system. In these teachers' interview comments, two somewhat distinct uses for the reference model could be identified. The first, implicit rationale seemed to be that its availability would enable pupils to monitor their language production, and improve its accuracy, especially in writing. Secondly, it was felt that conscious understanding of the language system enabled pupils to move from rote-learning of phrases to a more creative use of the target language system:

> It's all very well them learning phrases off by heart but it's no good if they can't then take another word and adapt it and stick it in the same situation. I see it so many times in French, in the first year, they learn things off parrot-fashion and then you say to them, "How do you say 'I have'"? and they haven't a clue, and they've done it so many times, "j'ai un frère", and they just haven't a clue! So they need to be told these things and have them pointed out to them, that's the way I feel (Teacher F).

These interpretations of the teachers' rationales for KAL received further confirmation from Teacher C's contrasting behaviour with her French and German classes. With the German class, there was very little explicit discussion/commentary on language at all; and those KAL episodes which occurred did not address any of the Area 1 morphosyntactic issues discussed in French lessons. The teacher explained the absence of attention to KAL, in terms of her low estimation of this group's overall academic ability, and limited expectations for their ultimate success in developing a creative FL competence.

In interview, several teachers did argue for broader rationales for KAL (e.g. Teacher D argued that explicit discussion of language was interesting in its own right). However, the dominant rationale expressed for explicit attention to KAL in the MFLs classroom remained its traditional perceived contribution to the development of pupils' target language proficiency.

KAL in the English classroom

In response to perceived National Curriculum requirements, teachers in Schools 1 and 2 reported that entire units of work with a KAL focus were currently being planned and/or implemented at various points across Years 7-9. Thus in School 1, the planning of explicit KAL units was reported on child language acquisition, on accent and dialect, and on language repertoires. In School 2, a unit on language change had been taught in Year 8. However, no such units were being taught to Year 9 during the actual period of observation. (The Oxfordshire data provided us with some direct accounts of KAL-related units of work being taught in Year 7: see below.)

Thus, the KAL work of the three English teachers which we observed directly (A, E, G) all arose in the course of units of work with some other focus. Their KAL concerns were much more diverse than those of the FLs teachers, although various common points did emerge. Most notably, the work seen was very largely text-focused: insofar as they engaged with KAL during the observation period, they shared a commitment to explicit talk about the characteristics of particular text genres, literary or non-literary. These teachers were much more likely than the FLs teachers to talk about features of whole texts, much less likely to refer to specific detail at the sentence level or below.

During the period of observation, Teacher A was working mainly on a Shakespeare play (including the production of a related 'newspaper'), with some further poetry lessons. For her, the main KAL area receiving attention was Area 3, "Language Variation according to Use". In over 20 episodes, mostly pre-planned, the main emphasis was on the characteristics of newspaper reporting, and the stylistic devices of poetry. Area 1 ("Language as System") received planned attention on two occasions, when substantial episodes intended to provide remedial guidance on punctuation interrupted the Shakespeare sequence.

Teacher G also centred a proportion of her observed lessons on the reading of a (modern) play, and on poetry. However, there was little explicit discussion of the stylistic/linguistic characteristics of these genres. Instead, most KAL-related talk arose around a project to develop pupils' oral presentation skills, and an essay-writing sequence. Both these sequences involved extensive teacher-led discussion of the characteristics of effective talk and of effective essays, and the development of criteria for evaluating both; these episodes related mostly to KAL Areas 2 and 3, "Acquisition" and "Variation According to Use".

In addition, Teacher G paid considerable attention to Area 4 ("Language Variation according to User": 7 episodes). She taught one substantial planned episode, on contrasts between 'slang' and Standard English, and referred in passing elsewhere to accent/dialect variation, and associated language attitudes. She also referred intermittently to the bilingualism of some pupils, with the evident aim, confirmed in interview, of raising the profile and status of their mother tongue (Bengali) in the school. However, she paid very little attention to Area 1, "Language as System".

The third English teacher, Teacher E, generated the fewest explicit KAL episodes. Though studying a 'class novel' during some of the observed lessons, he was also very concerned to develop the creative potential of his pupils, and to enable them to see connections between activities in English lessons and 'real life', including events in the news, and their own personal and emotional development. His strategies included close study of selected text extracts, contrasting fiction with non-fiction, and brainstorming techniques to promote word associations and extend pupils' vocabulary. Most of these activities were presented in a 'deep-end' experiential mode; such KAL episodes as occurred typically arose from text study, e.g.techniques used by Charles Dickens to create a particular descriptive account, or the imagery of a poem (Area 3). All other KAL areas were referred to rarely or not at all in his lessons.

Regarding rationales for KAL, Teachers A and G seemed to believe that establishment of explicit general criteria for e.g. newspaper writing, or interviewing, would feed through into more effective language performance. On observational evidence, Teachers A and E believed

that systematic and explicit study of technical details of literary genres would enhance pupils' encounters with, and response to, literature.

Teacher G was also concerned with pupils' personal development, in the sense of heightening their awareness of the power of language; and she believed that pluralist language attitudes could be fostered through classroom discussion:

> knowledge about language I hope is everywhere, I mean every time I have an opportunity to bring out some point about dialect or message or the power of words or the implications of what people - the hidden meanings or messages, I try to bring it out.

It is striking, however, that only Teacher A's isolated work on punctuation suggests any strong belief on the part of these teachers that pupils' skills in English could be improved through explicit "Language as System" instruction.

KAL in the Classroom: Contrasting Approaches

Thus, pupils in the English and FLs classrooms observed seem to be receiving largely unrelated messages in the KAL area. In the FLs classroom, attention is focused on "Language as System" at the sentence level or below, while in the English classroom, attention is focused on the level of the whole text, and on the distinctive characteristics of language genres, literary and non-literary.

It would also seem that these teachers' classroom practice has been influenced to only a limited extent by recent curriculum debates on KAL. The FLs teachers had been little affected by recent theories of second language acquisition which downgrade the role of explicit form-focused instruction; they were adhering to a fairly traditional view of the usefulness of reference pedagogic grammars, and working systematically to build up such knowledge, alongside more experiential and practice-oriented activities. The English teachers were planning the introduction of a greater KAL emphasis in the form of identifiable units and modules of work; but meanwhile, their classroom activity reflected traditional preoccupations with literature, with personal and social growth, and with creativity. In the service of these aims, explicit introduction to genres and styles of both talk and writing was seen as useful at a general level; but detailed language analysis was not regularly undertaken, and systematic exposition of "Language as System" was not seen as very relevant to learners beyond the initial stages of literacy development.

Pupils' Knowledge about Language 1: "Language as System"

Pupils' explicit knowledge of language as system was explored through group problem-solving tasks, plus individual discussions on texts produced in class.

Generally, these Year 9 pupils showed practical competence in such tasks as unscrambling jumbled texts, creating sentences from nonsense words, or correcting grammatically deviant

language (such as baby talk). However their ability to comment on and explain their decision-making in these tasks was very limited. Discussions about FLs texts gave the most productive insights into pupils' explicit knowledge of sentence grammar. Most pupils knew the names of a few parts of speech ('noun', 'verb', 'adjective'), but tended to define these in semantic rather than formal terms. Pupils in the upper and mixed-ability FLs sets could talk about the concepts of 'tense', 'gender' and 'number', and were aware that they governed a variety of morphosyntactic patterns, though few had any accurate grasp of detail. Pupils in the lower FLs set, and some other pupils identified as "weak" by their teachers, had little or no grasp of these concepts. Interestingly, a number of individual pupils in different schools identified an increased understanding of "how sentences are put together" as their major achievement in FLs learning in Year 9.

Pupils' understanding of text structure above the level of the sentence remained generally unsophisticated. They could talk in general terms about the need for "paragraphs" and appropriate spelling and punctuation in written texts, but did not have much else to say about the structuring of non-fictional writing; thus they typically evaluated their own writing only in terms of content and surface presentation. The main exception was connected with creative writing, as seen for example in School 3, where pupils could talk with considerably more sophistication about the crafting of a poem.

Pupils' Knowledge about Language 2: "Language Learning/Development"

A number of conclusions could be drawn from pupil tasks which explored understandings of language learning and development. Firstly, in both English and FLs, it was evident that pupils were better able to reflect on the context for learning than on the learning process itself. They attached great importance to their teachers' personal qualities, and generally assumed that experiences which they found personally interesting and involving would also be effective for learning.

When asked to evaluate the effectiveness of particular activities, pupils could make judgements, but found it hard to move beyond the generalities of "helps you learn", "helps you understand". Any articulation of a more precise relationship between a particular activity and development of a particular language competence was very rare.

Pupils' beliefs about how the learning process works were greatly influenced by their classroom experiences, but not to the exclusion of other ideas. For FLs, pupils consistently expressed the belief that systematic practice focusing on relatively micro aspects of the language system (word lists, verb morphology etc) was necessary for success - a belief consistent with their classroom experience. However, several also argued for the usefulness of various kinds of "immersion", of which they had much less first hand knowledge; and it did not seem that they accepted fully their teachers' general view that rule-giving and language analysis are essential for eventual creativity. In English, pupils predominantly accepted that language development takes place through language use (reading improves through reading, etc). However, their teachers' systematic efforts to sensitise them to the characteristics of different text types and genres went largely unrecognised in pupil discussions on effective learning. Thus, pupils in both subject areas appeared to some extent to discount the value of reflection on the nature of language, as their teachers were practising it.

Finally, however, it can be said that where teachers systematically encouraged reflection and analysis with respect to language *development* processes, clear traces remained in the thinking of their pupils.

Pupils' Knowledge about Language 3 & 4: "Language Variation"

Our third KAL area, "Language Variation according to Use", covered explicit knowledge in the areas of style, register and genre. On a problem-solving group task, pupils could identify genre types, though they were generally unable to explain in any technical way what precise features of the selected texts were distinctive to the genre. In evaluating their own non-fiction writing, pupils were preoccupied with matters of content and self-expression rather than style or appropriacy, and it was only in the context of creative writing (poetry) that they were able/ willing to articulate more technical and analytic comments on matters of style.

Pupils showed much greater analytic ability in our Area 4, "Language Variation according to User". The main data source was a group discussion task concerning speech styles in English. Across all three schools, pupils showed a lively awareness of social variation in spoken English, and could talk at some length about their own practices. Many pupils claimed personally to use a relatively neutral speech style, for which they offered informal definitions: "not too slang, not too posh, just in between" (School 2). This neutral style was contrasted with high and low styles, which pupils perceived in others' speech. Pupils were aware of variation in their own speech according to situation and interlocutor. Talk about different speech styles was richly illustrated with mimicked examples, and some pupils could also identify some specific pronunciation features (e.g. glottal stops) and syntactic features (e.g. 'ain't') which they associated with particular styles. School 2, with the most working-class intake, showed keenest awareness of features of urban dialect and, in particular, of possible social stigmas attaching to them.

Despite this relatively high level of awareness, pupils generally lacked technical vocabulary for discussion of dialectal and social variation, and there was considerable confusion and overlap among the concepts employed. Generally their comments seemed to reflect folk linguistic models current in the community rather than classroom-derived knowledge.

Pupils' Knowledge about Language 5: "Language Change"

Of all the KAL areas identified within the study, the issue of "Language Change" attracted least discussion in the observed lessons. Consequently, the pupil tasks for this dimension have been analysed only impressionistically. In one task, pupils showed some capacity to produce pastiche "Shakespearean" dialogue, mainly through a display of "archaic" lexis, address forms and exclamations. In another, they showed some awareness of the entry of "new" words into the English language. But little awareness was shown of syntactic change, and nothing more than limited common-sense speculations were advanced as to why such changes might come about.

Results from the Extension Study

KAL-focused Year 7 teaching in English

Firstly, the extension study, based on data supplied by the Oxford project, allowed us to explore KAL-related practices within English in two further secondary schools, with a younger age group (Year 7: 11-year-olds). This was an especially valuable addition, because it provided us with evidence from both teachers and pupils concerning the teaching of units of work with a central focus on KAL, in contrast to the main study data, where the KAL episodes directly observed generally arose out of units of work with some other focus.

In both these schools (called here Schools 4 and 5), units of work on the historical development of English were documented (our KAL Area 5, "Language Change"); this had had no direct parallel in the main study. At least two out of the four teachers concerned seemed to view such work as personally empowering for learners:

> It's enriching their own sense of their language and it's widening the vocabulary at their disposal.. and it's de-mystifying language so that they will feel more prepared to use unfamiliar words, I hope (Teacher OD).

(Indeed, concerns were expressed by these teachers that even the historical study of the language should be personally involving for pupils, and contribute to development of language skills.)

In one school (School 4), the work on the history of English was linked to another KAL focused unit on dialect and Standard English (Area 4: "Language Variation according to User"). In both schools, further KAL-focused work took place on textual variation, with discussion of the characteristics of stories and poetry, and of spoken and written language (Area 3:" Language Variation According to Use"). As in the main study schools, however, there were no reports of any work on "Language as System" being planned as a major focus, though incidental work on spelling and on terminology ('adjectives') was mentioned.

Year 7 pupils' talk about language

In School 4, the Year 7 pupils interviewed during the period of work on the historical development of English and on language variation recalled and reported on much of this explicit KAL-related activity. In contrast with the Year 9 pupils in the main study, they used a certain amount of technical vocabulary ('dialect', 'Standard English'), which presumably derived from their teacher's classroom talk. The Year 7 pupils had found the work valuable:

> I've never really thought about it before, it's sort of made me think about it [..] it's taught me lots of things that I don't know.

They could recall the teacher's aims for this work, though these may not have been perfectly reconciled with other values deriving from the community, as the following conflicting quotations from the same interview show:

> "[Teacher OD] was telling us that you can speak the way you like, and it doesn't really matter if you speak differently to other people [..] it helped us to, like, not judge people by the way they speak but by their intelligence as well [..] he's teaching us not to take the mickey out of people that come from different places."
>
> "I used to live in Birmingham and I spoke very funny, people used to take the mickey out of me, but I learnt to speak properly like they do round here, and people started taking me normally".

Generally though, and despite their experience of a focused unit of work on the topic, these young people showed rather less awareness of variation in spoken English, or of their own non-standard use of urban dialect forms, than the Year 9 pupils interviewed in the main study.

The concerns of the Oxford project meant that the Year 7 pupils in Schools 4 and 5 had considerable opportunities to reflect on learning in English lessons (in our terms, on "Language Learning/ Development": Area 2). However, these pupils talked about Area 2 themes in much the same general and common-sense terms as the Year 9 pupils in the main study, again valuing activities primarily for their promotion of involvement and enjoyment, and talking much more fluently about the general context for learning than about language-specific strategies and processes. As for the main study pupils, the most striking connections suggested by some individuals among the year 7 pupils between KAL and language skill development were connected with Area 3 ("Language Variation According to Use"). Several individuals whose teachers had committed lesson time to analysing textual structure testified to the usefulness of this, e.g. in crafting their own writing:

> My stories used to be quite boring [..] [then] we learned about how to write stories and descriptions of characters, how to start a story and finish a story and the middle of a story [..] we learned about all different ways to write stories and stuff, and then I used the things I'd learned in my story, and I put loads of description and it was brilliant, I love that story.

Finally, few comments relating to "Language as System" were in evidence in the Year 7 pupil material.

Reflection and meta-talk in a non-language subject

As a final step in the extension study, the post-lesson interviews conducted by the Oxford researchers with two teachers of Year 7 History in another school (here called School 6), and a selection of their pupils, were analysed for any instances of reported classroom use of metacomment and reflection on the nature and skills of History as a discipline. Underlying these teachers' lesson planning was a very deliberate consideration of the skills and understandings they wanted the pupils to acquire. However it seemed that, at least with Year 7, they sought to promote pupils' learning largely through experience, and to further the development of historical skills and understanding without explicit classroom reflection:

> In order to learn the skills, they have to do it. They can't just be told it all the time [..] they're not going to experience the skills in the same way just by me telling them about everything
> (Teacher 0E).

It was however suggested that a more reflective approach was appropriate further up the school (with specific mentions of Years 10 and 11), and that pupils' initiation into a more explicit discussion of the skills of History must be gradual.

The Year 7 History pupils' accounts were largely consistent with the approach documented in the teacher interviews. They tended most prominently to report lesson activities concerned with experience, with 'doing' such as role play or acting, involving pair or group discussion and collaboration; they also reported working from a variety of historical 'sources', and a rich variety of teacher-led activities. Little sustained and/or deliberate metacomment was reported however, in line with the inductive and experiential approach of their teachers.

Thus the role within the project overall of this small scale and exploratory probe into another subject area was somewhat unexpected: it was ultimately to make us aware of the extent to which language teachers are positively promoting metatalk and reflection in their lessons. Clearly, much more sustained comparative studies would be required, however, to determine whether the striking contrast between History and languages on this point was merely a chance finding, or had a more systematic and educationally significant foundation.

General Conclusions

The nature of KAL: Our attempts to operationalise the notion of "KAL" has led us increasingly to recognise the diversity of the elements conventionally treated as belonging within it, and the need for distinct rationales for the inclusion of these diverse elements within the curriculum. More theoretical work is needed, to elaborate the concept of KAL (and if necessary to break it down into its constituent parts), and to state much more explicitly the rationales which underpin KAL work, if it is to be integrated into the curriculum on a principled and systematic basis.

Classroom practice: At present, KAL work in the classroom is varied, even idiosyncratic, as teachers seek to make personal sense of unclear policy statements. There is little common ground across the language subjects in the degree of attention paid to different aspects of KAL. While many effective KAL episodes were seen, they did not add up to a developmentally coherent curriculum strand.

Teachers' KAL: There was some evidence that the limits to teachers' own linguistic knowledge were a constraint on the development of maximally effective KAL work. This could be seen even in some KAL-focused units, which at times seemed to have conveyed inaccurate messages to pupils; more generally, teachers' tendency to avoid technical vocabulary in KAL-related talk seemed linked at times to insecurity in using grammatical or discourse terminology.

Pupils' KAL: The knowledge about language displayed by pupils was patchy and often inconsistent/inaccurate; generally, pupils talked hesitantly about KAL matters. However, there were moments where pupils' grasp of technical concepts and vocabulary, and ability to discuss fluently, were strikingly more secure. These topics could often be traced back to teacher-led classroom episodes promoting textual analysis and the establishment of explicit criteria for effective language use; we believe these episodes are important indicators of what might be possible, were language educators of all kinds to address more systematically the sharing of analytic frameworks and learning theories with their pupils.

KAL and language development: There are suggestions in our data that certain kinds of KAL-related talk and activities may promote language skill development and effective language performance. Evidence from School 3 suggests that the promotion of self-awareness and understanding about learning strategies (Area 2) can encourage pupils to become more active and responsible learners. Evidence from the same school suggests that where pupils are systematically encouraged to deconstruct and analyse a particular (literary) genre, they become more reflective and are aware of more possibilities when themselves trying to create texts within the genre. Finally, evidence from Schools 1 and 2 suggests that at least some pupils are able to exploit conscious grammatical knowledge, in creating original foreign language written texts. We believe that most language development will rightly continue to take place primarily through practice and experience of language use; but that a more consistent sharing of KAL frameworks and analytic tools will help pupils ultimately to become mature and self-aware users, controlling a range of stylistic choices.

* * * * *

Note: A full and detailed account of the whole project will appear in an academic book, probably in 1995. In addition, a shorter book discussing the teaching of KAL, and including example materials, will be produced. Meanwhile, more detailed discussion of aspects of the project can be found in the papers listed below.

Appendix: Conference papers / publications

a) Mitchell, R : "Grammar, syllabuses and teachers". Plenary paper, BAAL Seminar on "Grammar in the L2 Classroom", University of Reading, July 1991. (To appear in Bygate, M and Tonkin, A (eds) *Grammar in the Second Language Classroom*. Macmillan.)

b) C. Brumfit, R. Mitchell, J. Hooper : "Language awareness in secondary schools : some empirical evidence", NCcLA Conference, Bangor, April 1992.

c) C. Brumfit, R. Mitchell, J. Hooper : "Researching children's language awareness in English and Modern Languages classrooms", Joint ALL/IATEFL Conference, Edinburgh, April 1992.

d) C. Brumfit, R. Mitchell, J. Hooper : "Perceptions of language and language learning in English and Foreign Languages classrooms", BERA Conference, Stirling, August 1992. (To appear in Hughes, M ed "Perceptions of Teaching and Learning", *BERA Dialogues* 8, due April 1994.)

e) R. Mitchell, C. Brumfit : "The place of 'Knowledge about Language' in the mother tongue and Foreign Language curriculum", 10th. World Congress of Applied Linguistics, Amsterdam, August 1993. (To appear in Dechert, H ed. *Metacognition in Language Learning.*)

f) R. Mitchell, C. Brumfit, J. Hooper : "Coherence, Knowledge about Language and language learning", BERA Conference, Liverpool, September 1993.

g) J. Hooper: "Language awareness". Chapter to appear in Brumfit, C. J. (ed) *Language Teaching in the National Curriculum*, to be published by Blackwell, 1994.

h) R. Mitchell, C. Brumfit, J. Hooper: "'Knowledge about Language' in the classroom: Conflicting rationales, diversity of practice". Chapter to appear in Hughes, M (ed) *The Quality of Teaching & Learning* (tentative title), to be published by Blackwell, 1994/5.

i) C. Brumfit, R. Mitchell, J. Hooper: "Explicit Knowledge about Language in the mother tongue and Foreign Language classroom". To appear in Special Issue of *Research Papers in Education*, 1994.

j) J. Hooper: "The 'learnability' of grammar in the communicative classroom: the baby/bathwater dilemma", Language World Conference, Southampton, March 1994.

k) C. Brumfit, R. Mitchell, J. Hooper: "Continuities and discontinuities in the L1 and L2 classroom: the case of metalanguage", American Association for Applied Linguistics Annual Conference, Baltimore, March 1994.

l) J. Hooper, C. Brumfit, R. Mitchell: "Language awareness and language development: can we trace links?", Association for Language Awareness International Conference, Plymouth, April 1994.

m) R. Mitchell, C. Brumfit, J. Hooper: "Coherence, knowledge about language and language learning", American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting, New Orleans, April 1994.

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